

Developing PDR/Appraisals

“Introducing performance ratings in HE, whether or not they are linked to pay, is deeply problematic. Any institution considering going down that road needs to be very clear as to how this will improve what they do, and be sure that the potential costs in terms of staff morale and collegiality will not outweigh the expected gains.”

“We need to be clear why we are doing things and what purpose they serve. So how does rating contribution support the achievement of strategic aims, and indeed does it?”

Strong messages emerging from the discussions centred around two key themes of Ratings and Accountability (and connections between the two). We also talked about competencies and on-line tools.

Ratings:

- Why have ratings? What’s the driver, what purpose will ratings serve?
- What are you doing with the ratings? Is it a “stock-taking” exercise? Who has access to the ratings information (confidentiality)?
- What would a rating get people to do that they are not already doing?
- If you are going to have a rating you need to be absolutely clear what the point is in order to ‘sell’ it.
- Ratings not directly linked to pay are not popular or useful
- The emphasis on any performance rating must be on ‘performance in the round’ rather than simply ‘achievement of objectives’. In this respect, a suitable competencies framework can act as a useful reference point for strengthening the process.
- The terms used when forming a rating system can be as important as the system itself in encouraging/discouraging people to use it. E.g what does ‘good’ or ‘satisfactory’ actually mean
- Would need to be used in conjunction with other methods of feedback e.g. Student surveys, Peer review, REF etc
- Very few jobs in HE can be measured, as they are too subjective
- Could be carefully used to demonstrate sustained contribution to get promotion points
- What would it get academics to do that they don’t already do?
- Too much focus on the individual, rather than the team and their strategic impact.
- Move from competencies to behaviours

Accountability Issues:

- Appraisers reluctance to grade low
- Relationship between appraiser/appraisee and legitimacy in rating (in particular academics)
- Managers reluctance/skills to manage and have the performance conversation
- Performance assessment is not/should not be a once a year task.
- Performance/productivity increases arise through better management practice. How to encourage more frequent, naturally occurring practice of performance assessment?
- What motivation is there for managers (and their managers) to commit to good performance management practices (and commitment to appraisal process)?
- Post PDR calibration exercises are necessary to support robust judgement and bring credibility to the process
- Needs to feed into any talent management process
- Is it just collecting data for data’s sake or do you act on it
- Where does the information collected go? How is it used? Confidentiality issues.

- A route suggested including having a panel/board looking at all PDR outcomes and looking for trends, consolidating marks e.t.c. as you would with students. This would help calibrate.

On-line

- Concern around moving to on-line systems just for the sake of it with no added value
- Those who did on-line PDRs were not able to collect adequate data from it
- Those moving to integrated HR systems were sceptical as to the usefulness of the on-line PDR type tools, if in fact they ever materialise.
- Nothing currently available that does what staff developers need from them

In short

Everyone just wanted a tool to enable managers to have good quality conversations and to actually manage performance (good and bad).

It wasn't felt that current systems really did this but that the proposed moves to more stringent processes with ratings would have the reverse effect.

Left us with more questions than answers:

What do we do as Staff Developers to achieve continuous review and regular good quality conversations?

(see also supporting article from the Wall street journal)

As a form of action learning, even though we didn't draw any concrete conclusions, most felt that this was a worth-while exercise and useful to gather to focus one subject area. The networking and sharing of experiences in this way should be repeated.